From:	Fox & Hounds
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Subject:	Fox & Hounds Daily Update - April 21, 2017
Date:	Friday, April 21, 2017 12:01:21 PM

Fox&Hounds discusses and explains the confluence of politics and business in California through our blog, featuring opinion pieces written by leaders from across the state published daily. Read below to see what's new on the site today.

Will Adoption of the Open Primary Increase Voter Clout?
By Richard Rubin

When Proposition 14 was adopted by California voters in June 2010—the so-called blanket or open primary— it signaled an interest in moving away from strict partisanship —sort of.
Under this law, statewide and congressional candidates run against each other on the same ballot regardless of party affiliation. The top two vote-getters move on to the general election. However, candidates must still have ballot designations according to their party registration. The presidential primary, judgeships and non-partisan offices are not affected.
In theory this was intended to promote greater competition. In practice, given the preponderance of Democratic voters in the state, the two candidates advancing to the November run-off are more likely to be Democrats.

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Brown Ended Socal "Drought Emergency" Too Soon
By Ralph E. Shaffer

A week into April, in the wake of one of the wettest Januarys and Februarys on record, Gov. Jerry Brown declared that the state's drought emergency was over. Lawn watering, except in the face of an approaching storm, was no longer an uncivil act. Home owners needn't snitch on lawn-watering neighbors any longer. Suburban life in SoCal would return to near normal because Mother Nature had resumed a more routine weather cycle. In fact, it hadn't. The rainfall pattern had already reverted to a drought condition when the governor made his popular but premature announcement.
For five long years – it seemed even longer – high pressure ridges in the eastern Pacific blocked the usual storms that in the past had brought winter rain to SoCal. The rainy season in 2010-11 produced more than a normal rainfall, exceeding the 139 year annual average by over five inches. Over 20 inches of rain fell that season.

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Will Prop 54 Produce More Backroom Deals?
By Joe Mathews

California's long history of political reform is one very substantial argument for how reforms produce unintended consequences, often the very opposite of what reformers said they wanted. Prop 54 is well on its way to becoming another example of this phenomenon.
The centerpiece of Prop 54, approved by voters last year and backed by all right-thinking (just ask them) good government types in California, was a rule mandating transparency through a 72-hour rule. Bills would have to be in print for 72 hours before a final vote; the theory was that this would bring transparency and end the Capitol tradition of backroom deals that inserted late provisions into major legislation.
But in practice, the 72-hour rule is likely to have the opposite effect.

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In transportation tax rush, did Sacramento break the law?
By Susan Shelley

Did lawmakers break the law when they passed Senate Bill 1, the transportation tax increase? There's a quaint provision in the California Constitution that reads, "A person who seeks to influence the vote or action of a member of the Legislature in the member's legislative capacity by bribery, promise of reward, intimidation, or other dishonest means, or a member of the Legislature so influenced, is guilty of a felony."
By the time Gov. Jerry Brown finished twisting arms and greasing palms to pass a massive transportation tax hike, that antique language was on the curb like a broken grandfather clock waiting for a bulky-item pickup.
Brown and legislative leaders promised a billion dollars for specific local projects in the districts of wavering lawmakers, and one termed-out Republican senator made a deal for a law to protect people in his profession — civil engineering, not the profession you're thinking of — from liability in construction lawsuits.

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Senate Democrats Block Sen. Bates' Bill to Reclassify Heinous Crimes as "Violent"
By Senator Pat Bates

(Editor's note: This a press release from the office of Sen. Bates.)
Democrats on the Senate Public Safety Committee voted down Senate Bill 75 by Senate Republican Leader Patricia Bates (R-Laguna Niguel) on a partisan 5 to 2 vote that would have expanded the definition of "violent felonies." It would have covered additional offenses deemed to be serious and violent in nature by many Californians, including solicitation to commit murder and assault with a deadly weapon on a peace officer or firefighter.
"I respect my Democratic colleagues on the Public Safety Committee for philosophically disagreeing with me on the length of prison sentences, but blocking my violent felony bill today nevertheless jeopardizes the safety of all Californians," said Bates. "I do not understand how anyone can say with a straight face that crimes such as assault with a deadly weapon on law enforcement should continue to be considered 'non-violent.' People who commit the crimes covered by Senate Bill 75 deserve to be in prison longer because of the physical and emotional harm they inflict on victims."

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